

Freshman Lynn Herrick recalls more than her "arrival" in her entertaining excursions with . . .

Louie the Cab Driver: A Portrait

BY LYNN HERRICK

Some people join the Chicago Club. But for years, *some* people in Chicago knew they'd really "arrived" when they were accepted as passengers by Louie the Cab Driver.

If you or someone in your family worked in the Wrigley Building, Tribune Tower, London Guaranty, "333," or some nearby building, you passed the first requirement, for Lou's private cab shuttled back and forth between the commuters' entrance of the Northwestern station and the Michigan Avenue Bridge. The "first Louie" met the 7:39 train, the "second Louie" met the 8:05, and so on. Some fathers caught the first bus to work; mine caught the second Louie.

Of course, you *could* work your way into the "Louie Club" through a proper introduction from a "member," but it might take you some time. The main requirement, though, for being driven to and from work, trains, and airports by one of the best and most dependable drivers in the business was very simple: Louis Shaps had to like you.

If Lou didn't like you, the cab was full as far as you were concerned if there was one other person in it, but if he did like you, there was always room for you on top of eight or nine others. Somehow it was always more comfortable to be crammed into that five- or six-passenger cab with ten other persons than to have plenty of room in the common garden variety of cab.

Taking a "Louie" downtown was quite an experience; I know because I've taken them with my father. If you could see over the two or three layers of people in front of you, you were sure to be fascinated by the equipment in that cab—cigarettes, matches, mints, cough drops, and even extra money in case someone came downtown without his billfold. There was even a telephone right in the cab, so that Lou's customers could reach him any time and any place.

Like any loyal passenger, I still have this "membership" card:

Now me and my cab are as near as your phone!
Just ask for "Long Distance,"
... then ask for "Mobile Operator JL 4-2494" ...
and tell me where you want to go and when.
And remember ... Lou's service is DEEpendable!
I'm your *Lou*.

Don't forget, though, that if you were eligible to ride in Lou's cab, you were a fair target for his constant criticism, delivered deadpan but with a slight twinkle if you looked hard enough for it. He criticized his customers' ties, their cars, their haircuts, or anything else that fell short of his standards for them:

"All right, you guys, quit kickin' the seats! Keep ya feet off the seats! I just cleaned the car ... Bowers, you should never 'a' got another brown suit; nobody but me knows when ya got a new one ... Herrick's tryin' to give me pneumonia again; the colder it is, the lower he rolls the window ... Boulton, with a cold like yours, you shoulda stayed home—they'd never miss ya at the office. I gotta trip north about three to pick up some film. If ya wanta be out front then, I could drop ya off in Evanston. O.K.? Not that I care about your cold—you're just another fare to me ... All right, all right! Get out, get out! Now lookit that car! Mud an' ashes all over the floor! ..."

As if this weren't enough, once in a while he would announce, "Guess I'll sing for ya," and burst into song. After one of his renditions of "Glow Worm" or "Peggy O'Neil" in a rather faltering tenor, he would turn to his audience and marvel, "All this and Lou too!"

Sometimes the wiry little cab driver would take off his chauffeur's cap and ask his passenger, "How do you like my haircut?" It's hard to decide what you think of one of Lou's haircuts—the small fringe of gray hair around his otherwise bald head doesn't change much from day to day.

When Lou picked our family up after a vacation, things used to sound something like this:

"I brought Herrick some cigarettes so he wouldn't have to borrow from me till tomorrow. Need matches, too, I s'pose. Now can we go, or do I hafta lend ya the cab fare? ... Mrs. Herrick, don't let him touch that window! Even in the summer he can make a cold wind blow on the back o' my neck! Mrs. Herrick, can't you do nothing with that husband o' yours?"

Then my father would wonder aloud how long people could be expected to ride in a broken-down hack. He would detect a distinct

knock in the motor, notice that the automatic shift was lagging, and wonder if the car would run as far as Evanston, especially driven by someone who knew absolutely nothing about cars, let alone how to drive. This happy wrangle would go on as far as our house, then Lou would pull up and shake his head pityingly at the beautiful green lawn that is always my father's pride and joy. "Herrick," he would say, "you'll never learn to grow grass. That's got brown spots already!"

Lou really lived up to his card—he was as "DEEpendable" as they come. Day or night, rain or shine, if your train was on time or late, you could always count on him to meet your train, take you to your plane, or drive you home. If some advertising men at J. Walter Thompson were working late—even as late as 11:00—they would call Lou to take them home.

If they decided to stop and eat on the way, Lou flatly refused to join them, although they accused him of stuffiness and snobbery. (He's not really snobbish, though; he would play golf or go bowling with them, provided they were good enough players.)

By the time he had dropped them all off, one by one, at their homes in various suburbs, it would be about 2:00 in the morning before he got home to Chicago, but he was always up bright and early again to meet the morning trains and drive the "first Louie" from the station to the bridge.

Lou liked to announce to traffic, "One side, everybody—here comes Lou!" but you *really* couldn't find a safer driver. If you were in a hurry, rather than speed he would turn off onto some little street you never knew existed and come out right by your destination. The chances are he waved to every policeman along the way, too.

Yes, he probably knows every short cut and every policeman in Chicago. People used to say that if you were ever looking for Lou, he would be the one parked between the fire plug and the "No Parking" sign, passing the time of day with the policeman.

For years, those films of the Northwestern University games that you saw on television and the picture of them that you saw in the newspapers were the ones that Lou picked up at Dyche Stadium between halves every Saturday afternoon and rushed back down to the television stations and newspapers in time for the late editions and the sports programs.

And it was Lou that Evanstonians saw driving the Associated Press car that accompanied General MacArthur several years ago on his way from Chicago to Milwaukee.

Of Russian birth and Jewish faith, Lou certainly does his best to see that his friends have a Merry Christmas. For one thing, every year he and Mrs. Shaps—"Mama," as he calls her—stay up late at night packing the trunk of Lou's cab with more than a hundred boxes of Mama's very special, homemade fudge. As long as I've known him, he's sent home an extra box for me.

But Christmas, 1952, wasn't the same without the fudge. That year, Louie the Cab Driver was in the hospital.

A week or so before, Lou had been sure there was something wrong with his heart. The doctors couldn't find anything wrong. He looked fine, and his cardiograph didn't show anything. Just then—in the hospital, a doctor at hand, an oxygen tank a few feet away—Lou had his heart attack. As usual, his timing was perfect, and he proved what he had always told his customers: "You guys can laugh if you want to, but *Lou knows best!*"

No one who was used to taking the first, second, or third Louie forgot him. As his Christmas card said, . . .

I shout at ya . . .

"Don't kick the seats!"

I insults ya . . .

"Get out, get out!"

I calls ya names . . .

*"All right, you *!*!*, what are ya waiting for!"*

. . . And what do I get in return?

Lovel Kisses! Checks! Flowers! Cards! Letters! Phone calls!

I'm overwhelmed! So's Mama!

Thanks a million! And a Merry Christmas to you, too.

YOUR EVERLOVING LOU AND MAMA

The picture on the opposite page showed Lou's cap hanging on a hook below a sign, "*Temporarily out of order.*"

That card, by the way, was designed especially for Lou at a joint conference of the art and copy departments of J. Walter Thompson Co. He gives them all his business because they're the largest advertising agency in the world. Nothing's too good for Lou!

Knowing that Lou's earnings stopped when he stopped driving, his friends took up a collection for him. There was nothing official about it, and nobody was in charge of the money, but they managed to accumulate over \$1,100—more than enough to pay his hospital bill.

When the hospital finally lifted the ban on visitors for Lou, I hope the doctors read between the lines when they heard visitors telling him how traffic had suddenly come unsnarled since a certain

cab driver was off the streets and what a relief it was to ride with someone who knew how to drive. As a matter of fact, as soon as Lou could have visitors "Mama" called up my mother and told her, "Tell Mr. Herrick to come and bawl him out. It'll make him feel better."

But no matter what they told Lou about the service they were getting, the "Louie Club" was never able to find a new Louie. They tried three or four other drivers, but nobody seemed to fit in. One wouldn't take more passengers than his car would hold. Another always left at the time he was supposed to leave. (How was he to know who would be coming out in a few minutes?) A third tried too hard, with his chauffeur's uniform and his white muffler. They were all obliging and polite and always trying to please . . . maybe *that's* what was wrong!

Discouraged, the "Club" has finally disbanded and become resigned to taking taxis.

Lou is out of the hospital now, but he'll never be able to drive his cab again. Just about the time he got out, though, the art department at J. Walter Thompson suddenly got dissatisfied with the way a certain "traffic" job was being handled. It was a small job with fair pay, and up to then it had been filled by one young man after another who had been either promoted or drafted. Now, all of a sudden, they started thinking that maybe some other kind of person could handle it better . . . maybe an older man . . . a *retired* older man . . .

Now we can take Lou literally when he says to a Thompson man back from a trip, "We got a new account while you were gone." Now the world's largest advertising organization with agencies can point to its offices all over the world and its hundreds of famous accounts and brag, "All this and Lou, too!"